

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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PIERCE FILES BILL TO PROTECT STATE FORESTS

INDIANAPOLIS – State Rep. Matt Pierce (D-Bloomington) has introduced legislation requiring the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to designate environmentally sensitive areas in state forests as protected wilderness areas.

House Bill 1263 would also require the DNR to accept public comments about its plans for the forests and to perform proper environmental studies.

"The Daniels Administration's recent decision to quadruple logging in state forests and allow clear cutting was largely based on input from the logging industry, while ignoring important environmental considerations," Pierce said. "The public should not be shut out of decisions about its forests."

House Bill 1263 would require the DNR to accept public comments and conduct public hearings about any forest management plan.

Pierce said the bill also would make it clear that the DNR must follow the Indiana Environmental Policy Act, which requires careful consideration of how decisions about the forest impact their environment.

In addition, promotion of tourism and recreation in state forests would be made official state policy by the bill. DNR officials claim that current state law directs it to make logging in the forests a priority.

"I suspect the administration was motivated by the Governor's desire to convert state assets into available cash and backed its way into the decision, while claiming it was based on what is best for the environment," Pierce said.

Pierce is concerned that the Daniels administration is authorizing logging in areas of the state that are critical to certain species. Environmentalists have raised concerns about logging in habitats for the Indiana bat in the Harrison-Crawford State Forest near Wyandotte Cave.

His bill requires the DNR to place environmentally sensitive areas of state forests into protected wilderness status where logging could not occur.

"It's bad enough that the DNR is quadrupling logging without proper consideration of its impact on the environment. But permitting logging on some of the state's most sensitive land defies logic," Pierce said.

"The Daniels Administration is holding state forests in trust for the people of Indiana. It has an obligation to protect the forest for future generations," he concluded.

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